



Copy 17 of 20

12 June 1964

DRAFT

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Disclosure to the USSR of US Satellite Reconnaissance

SUMMARY

A. We have reviewed once again the question of revealing to the USSR the nature and extent of the US reconnaissance satellite program. In our reexamination we have taken account of new developments since March 1963, when NSAM 216 decided against any such disclosure.

B. We continue to believe that this decision is justified. In our view, the probable adverse consequences outweigh the gains the US might possibly obtain from any disclosures to the USSR. Any disclosure would be likely to reduce the effectiveness of satellite photography, because the Soviets would be made better able to take deceptive countermeasures. There is, moreover, a significant chance that the USSR would be moved to try to stop

TOP SECRET/ []

GROUP 1
Excluded from automatic
downgrading and
declassification

TOP SECRET/

25X1

or limit the US program through international political action or even physical interference. The Soviets would certainly take advantage of such disclosures to support their contention that is satellite reconnaissance capabilities deprive continued U-2 flights over Cuba of any justification.

C. The supposed advantages to be gained from disclosure, in relation to the inspection requirements of disarmament agreements or to international acceptance of satellite reconnaissance, are highly doubtful, with no assurance that the end result would be a net gain for the US.

DISCUSSION

1. Satellite photography of the USSR is the essential intelligence means for estimating the present and potential strength of the Soviet strategic striking forces. In the foreseeable future we see no other means of obtaining such reliable information. Moreover, as the Soviets continue to change and modify their missile programs, with new systems in test, hardening of sites, possible camouflage, and prospective changes in deployment patterns, satellite reconnaissance will continue to be indispensable.

- 2 -

TOP SECRET/

25X1

TOP SECRET/ ☐

25X1

Disclosure to the USSR of this program, therefore, would have to serve vital US national interests. The supposed gains for the US from either public or private disclosures to the USSR must be measured against the substantial risk of destroying the program or greatly reducing its effectiveness.

Supposed Advantages

2. It may be supposed that the disclosures under consideration might lead to international acceptance of satellite reconnaissance, if made without provoking an adverse Soviet reaction. In view of Khrushchev's recent interviews confirming that the USSR has used its satellites for photography, a certain tacit understanding seems to have already come about. But an official confirmation by the US might jeopardize this delicate state of affairs. The official Soviet position is still highly critical of US use of outer space for intelligence purposes, despite Khrushchev's informal remarks, which were intended for Western consumption and limited to the Cuban situation. A public announcement might compel the USSR to denounce the US practice rather than officially accept it.

3. As to the disarmament question, this is a double edged word. It can be argued that satellite reconnaissance could be

- 3 -

TOP SECRET/ ☐

25X1

TOP SECRET/

25X1

used to verify disarmament agreements, particularly the destruction on non-deployment of ICBMs. It may be argued further that revelations to the USSR would be persuade it military secrecy is no longer possible and that therefore it might as well agree to on-site inspections. The USSR, however, would almost certainly respond to this line of argumentation by insisting that satellite reconnaissance proved its own long standing contention that on-site inspections are unnecessary for verification of the implementation of disarmament agreements. In any ensuing debate on the capability or limitations of satellite reconnaissance, the US might be forced to back up its position with technical evidence, without any assurance that the USSR would not turn around and propose that both sides refrain from collecting intelligence through satellites until a disarmament agreement was negotiated. Moreover, we know that satellite photography cannot in fact verify all aspects of disarmament (vice Cuba), and we have strong doubts that the Soviets could be persuaded to drop their objections to foreign inspection of Soviet facilities.

Probable Disadvantages

4. We currently estimate that the Soviets have a fairly good knowledge of the quantity and quality of the photography

- 4 -

TOP SECRET/

25X1

TOP SECRET

25X1

obtained by the US through the use of satellites. However, they cannot know precisely how the US take has been affected by operational factors and what intelligence success the US has actually achieved in terms of both coverage and photo interpretation. Once the subject was raised, the Soviets might respond in a moderate fashion in order to learn as much as possible about the US program. They might, for example, press for a complete technical examination of the use of satellite photography as a means of verifying disarmament agreements. Any exchange of information would almost certainly be to the net advantage of the USSR. To the extent that the US divulged details of its program, the Soviets would be in a better position to develop countermeasures to reduce the effectiveness of US photography. Deliberate deception and camouflage programs might be undertaken, even at great expense.

5. Inasmuch as the official Soviet position still condemns the use of satellites for intelligence purposes, it is equally likely that the Soviets would react adversely to any US disclosure. They might launch a campaign for an international agreement to prohibit the use of outerspace for any intelligence gathering. The chances of such a vigorous reaction would be greater if the US made a public announcement, since it would be difficult for the Soviets to condone officially US intelligence operations. The Soviet

- 5 -

TOP SECRET

25X1

TOP SECRET/[]

25X1

military would almost certainly increase pressure on the party leaders to offset US targetting information by hardening missile sites and deploying mobile systems. They might also demand that the US program be stopped, by political action or else by physical means, although the value they attach to Soviet satellite photography might militate against their advocacy of this course. The USSR now has the physical means to neutralize US reconnaissance satellites, but this would require a nuclear burst in violation of the Test Ban Treaty.

6. Public or private revelations of our reconnaissance satellite program to the Soviets would seriously undercut the present US position that U-2 surveillance of Cuba is necessary in the absence of an agreement on ground inspection. The obvious purpose of Khrushchev's interviews with Benton and Pearson was to urge the US to abandon the U-2 overflights of Cuba and rely instead on satellite reconnaissance, as Castro suggested in his May Day speech.

Private Versus Public Disclosure

7. If, despite the foregoing considerations, it is decided to make some disclosure to the USSR, the use of private channels would be preferable to a public announcement. In a private

- 6 -

TOP SECRET/[]

25X1

dialogue with the Soviets the US would still retain more flexibility, avoid the impression of a negotiation, and keep open the option of a later public announcement, if the Soviet response was favorable to the US purpose. Moreover, the Soviets would probably be more forthcoming in private than if they were compelled to engage in public exchanges. Finally, international (e.g., UN) involvement would be avoided. But of course the USSR could always publicize the substance of private discussions, if it appears advantageous to do so. Once the matter had become public, the US would have to defend the legality and necessity of its program against whatever tactics the Soviets might devise or any adverse international reactions.

- 7 -

TOP SECRET/[]

25X1

25X1

Approved For Release 2004/12/20 : CIA-RDP79R01095A000800030003-8

Approved For Release 2004/12/20 : CIA-RDP79R01095A000800030003-8